

Titabet and the Takumbeng



Kehbuma Langmia

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TITABET & the TAKUMBENG

A Play by
Kehbuma Langmia



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FOREWORD

I am honoured to write this foreword to Kehbuma Langmia's play, *Titabet and the Takumeng*, not least because I have had the pleasure of seeing the work develop through a number of drafts. I first met the playwright at a meeting of African theatre activists in Germany in 2001 and it was thereafter that he showed me an outline. We continued to exchange ideas, and Kehbuma Langmia sent me a series of drafts for us to discuss. He then went quiet for some time. So I was delighted when he contacted me in 2007 to say that he had found a publisher for the play and would like me to write an introduction.

No-one should under-estimate how difficult it is for new African playwrights to find opportunities to refine their craft, to get performed and published. Langmia was a student of the late and lamented Hansel Eyoh who did so much to promote Anglophone theatre in Cameroon. His work has resulted in the emergence of a number of playwrights and a strong theatre for development tradition. However, with its mixed language traditions - Cameroon has many local languages and a population that is split between those of Anglophone and Francophone colonial heritage – the Anglophone world probably knows less of the country than it does about the other English-speaking nations of West Africa. This only exacerbates the problems that all African writers experience in getting their work out to an international public. Like all too many African intellectuals Kehbuma Langmia has had to go abroad to develop his career and he now teaches media and mass communication at Bowie State University in the USA.

Titabet and the Takumeng is particularly interesting because it imaginatively chronicles a true historical event. In 1992 Cameroon had its first democratic multi-party elections, but as in so many African countries the result was disputed. The Francophone dominated party of the capital, Yaoundé, the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement, apparently won the election but the result was rejected by the historically marginalized peoples of Anglophone Cameroon. When the military sought to arrest the leader of the Social Democratic Party, Ni John Fru Ndi, a successful resistance was mounted by the women's cult group, the Takumbeng, who had already led a campaign of civil disobedience, which resulted in the military having to back down.

All too often women have been seen as powerless, submissive and quiescent in Africa, both within patriarchal cultures and in the context of political struggles. While an important struggle for women's rights is being fought on many fronts across the continent, and while it would be absurd to deny that African women have been and often continue to be oppressed as both black and female, it is also vital to recognise that women have historically had access to sources of political, social and economic power, particularly in a range of West African cultures. The Takumbeng is an indigenous women's organisation which in the 1990s demonstrated that traditional institutions can still wield effective and democratic power in moments of crisis.

Takumbeng is open to all women of post-menopausal age, and bases its power on the respect that must be shown to these women as both mothers and elders.

It is also rooted in a strong taboo regarding nudity; particularly the public nakedness of the mother. In 1992 the political standoff regarding election results led to all cities other than the capital being closed for business between Monday and Friday. The boycott was enforced primarily by groups of the Takumbeng patrolling the towns. When Ni John Fru Ndi's freedom was subsequently threatened the Takumbeng swung into further action. A group of older women surrounded their leader's home, and over succeeding days that group swelled in number. When orders were received to move through the women the Takumeng resorted to their final instrument. They raised their dresses, revealing their taboo nakedness and pointed their breasts, the instruments with which they had suckled men, towards the soldiers like guns. John was not arrested.

This is the story Kehbuma Langmia deals with in his play. Like so many African artists his theatre is not mere entertainment, it also has multiple didactic functions. Langmia profiles the power of women to act in support of democratic rights – and all his women are strong – for Nahsala, Titabet's wife, fiercely stands up to the military, both on behalf of her husband in prison, and in the face of the fear of rape when Captain Atangana comes in disguise to seek to intimidate her into betraying her people. He also demonstrates that tradition is not an ossified heritage without contemporary significance. The Takumeng is the most powerful instrument at the disposal of the resistant Anglophone Cameroonians, not because it is physically powerful, but because it reminds all Cameroonians of who they are, the mothers that bore them, and the lines that cannot be crossed in outraging public opinion.

A Cameroonian audience will, of course, be familiar with the story of political conflict and military arrogance told by *Titabet and the Takumeng*, but by bringing it to life through the realisation of key players as individuals, the significance of the central action and the sufferings of the people of the North West Province of Cameroon are made real for all. An international audience is unlikely to know anything of the conflict, and for them this play does more than tell a story from a little known African political struggle; it makes understandable key issues about abuses of power, military bullying and inequality of treatment that bedevil many postcolonial African nations. But it also tells a unique story; one of resistance led by elderly women, as keepers of a tradition of resistance to blatant abuse that they find can be utilised within a contemporary crisis. These women display with their most private being; with their naked bodies, their refusal to submit to brute force and alien domination.

I said above that Langmia's play has a didactic function, but it also manifests great aesthetic awareness. Kehbuma Langmia has an ear for language that reminds me of the great Nigerian playwright, Wole Soyinka. In *Titabet and the Takumeng* the central language is English, but the rhythms of speech and the extensive poetic use of proverb and metaphor remind us that in fact the characters would be using their indigenous tongue. The Francophone soldiers speak French amongst themselves, but resort to pidgin when they are trying to communicate with local villagers; and in the ritual and song sections Langmia utilises his mother tongue - Mungaka. This vocal polyphony reflects the multi-lingual reality of many African citizens, and is

complimented by a musical, percussive language that provides the centre to the ritual sections of the play.

Langmia has a complex history to convey but he allows time for the development of character, particularly between the central man and wife couple, Titabet and Nahsala, and between the two central soldiers, Captain Atangana and Corporal Ledou. However, these individuals are always portrayed within or against a strong community context. None of their actions solely concern themselves, and this we are never allowed to forget. At the centre of the action is the group, chorus-like voice of the Takumbeng, whose rituals and visual appearance, wild, semi-naked with painted bodies and utterly determined, would make the strongest of stage pictures.

Kehbuma Langmia is to be applauded for finding an authentic yet utterly contemporary means to tell a dramatic story, full of tension, of utmost importance to his own people and fascinating, educational and engaging for audiences anywhere.

Jane Plastow

Professor of African Theatre
University of Leeds

CHARACTERS

i) **NARRATOR**

ii) **TITABET** *Protagonist*

iii) **NAHSALA**..... *Wife of Titabet*

iv) **LEKUNGA**..... *Daughter of Titabet & Nahsala*

v) **Captain Atangana**

vi) **Corporal Ledou**

vii) **Mourners & Children**

viii) **Guard**

ix) **Nugang'a**

x) **Nahyuma**..... *Leader of Takumbeng*

xi) **Nahyeni**..... *First assistant to Nahyuma*

xii) **Nahvoma**..... *Second assistant to Nahyuma*

xiii) **Nahtema**..... *Third assistant to Nahyuma*

xiv) **Voice**

xv) **Takumbeng**..... *Group of Elderly angry women*

PHASE 1, SCENE 1

NARRATOR

[Coming from the back of the stage, the narrator dressed in a typical Bamenda costume holds a spear as he moves up stage. He has a red feather on the right hand side of his traditional cap. All the actors now seated on a curtained-covered stage react intermittently to his speeches. There is a war-like drumbeat at the back of the stage. The narrator sings and dances with the chorus coming from the rest of the actors on the covered stage.]

[Song in Munkaga language]

o o o wo ya, o o o wo ya

we o, we o, o o

ntsi ndab Kunú, nú ma mbendab

CHORUS

o o wo y a

wo ya, wo ya

o wo y a eh...

TRANSLATION

yes, yes, yes.

oh yes, oh yes.

*sleeping at home in peace, not
knowing that trouble is behind your house.*

yes, yes, yes.

NARRATOR

Must darkness drive away daylight at noon? Who is to blame? You tell me. Should I lick my vomit and then visit the toilet after? Please tell me the truth. I need your help. Help me unravel the riddles of my life.

[drumbeats and ululations]

Is it jungle law or peace? Who do you think owns the conscience of the people? Answer me! Who holds the key to our livelihood? We are in danger because our footprints have been sprinkled with the ashes of dead frogs and snails. What should we do? Tell me!

What is to be done? Help me unravel these riddles.

[drumbeats and ululations]

Tonight the sun will shine. The body of Numvi must be exhumed and placed at the doorstep of his killer. Enough is enough in this land. Greedy politicians must not be allowed to seal the fate of a people. We have the strength. The spirits of **Tateh, Doh debuli, Tah nuh, Koyila** our ancestors are still alive! Who then can break our ribs with guns and swell our lungs with tear gas?

[Ululations. No drumbeats]

The ruling government preys on us like a lion. Gone are the days of inhaled tear gas. Our stolen victory will creep on to the doorstep of the government. Tonight must be the end. We will not swallow the elephant tusks in the name of hunger. Bamenda people, like the barking dog, will not eat a frog for fear of a swollen stomach.

Look, Nugang'a's hands have been chopped off by grenades!!

[Light fades slowly on the narrator as drumbeats and ululations rise to a peak. Lights appear on

stage revealing a group of villagers wailing, keening and humming dirges around the body of Numvi. The narrator takes a seat with the members of the audience.]

TITABET

*[A strong-looking man of 40. He is wearing traditional **Yadala** gown of the North West people of Cameroon.]*

[Solemnly] My people! We must not fold our arms and shed ceaseless tears. These tears have been triggered by the government. Numvi was shot in the market today just because he refused to drink the urine of a soldier sent to keep watch over us. Are we little babies to be spoon fed?

MOURNERS

No! No! We must seek redress!

TITABET

Now see what has happened to a father of sixteen and three wives. His family has suddenly been plunged into misery. Who will determine the right path for his widows or his orphans? Their destiny is clouded. My people! Our forefathers knew dignified deaths. Now we die like birds. We are now hunted by these uncouth power-mongers. We must look for a way out to stop this barbarism in our land! No work until this situation is redressed. We must stay indoors No market, no transportation. We must boycott everything associated with the government. Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays we will carry out peaceful demonstrations.

[drumbeats and ululations. Holding the staff of 'TATEH', he performs rituals on the corpse]

Come forward everyone and perform the curse rituals.

[using special herbs and ash they move closer to the corpse. They sing another dirge and dance round the corpse. As they get ready to transport the corpse, sounds of gun-shots are closely heard. They freeze. Enter two soldiers armed to the teeth.]

CAPTAIN ATANGANA

[He is a middle-aged soldier wearing a red beret with two stars on his shoulders. He has a revolver in his hand.]

[LAUGHING] You want to eat up this body? Tell me primitive idiots, you want to cook this body and share among yourselves?

CORPORAL LEDOU

[He is fat and clumsy. He is in his early 40s. One star on his shoulder. Relaxed and sitting on the back of one of the mourners]

I was wondering why the entire city was so quiet today.
[Speaking in French] **Vraiment c'est incroyable!**

CAPTAIN ATANGANA

They were here planning evil? Are you aware of the fact that this body will soon decompose? Now you tell me really what you are planning to do with this criminal. Who is ready to speak?

[silence]

CORPORAL LEDOU

They must have taken an oath. It is typical of anglophones.
[whispering in French to captain] **Il faut tirer dans l'air.**
Ils vont degager. *[Turning to the mourners]* Have you taken an oath?

CAPTAIN ATANGANA

What oath? Do common people know what real oath taking is all about? We soldiers know it. They are led by a blind leader.

CORPORAL LEDOU

[Examining the corpse with the tip of his gun]
Look at the corpse. They have performed some rites on it. This is not how I left this stubborn man when I shot him.

CAPTAIN ATANGANA

[Tense] What have you done on this corpse? *[raising his voice]* Wh-a-t h-a-ve y-ou d-o-n-e- to th-is M-AN?
[long silence]

[unfolds his revolver]

I will execute you all if you don't cooperate. **Corporal, donnez-moi les balles.**

[Taking cartridges from him.]

CORPORAL LEDOU

[Recognising a pregnant woman]
You come here.
[She struggles to get up. Shivering]

TELL ME WHAT YOU ALL HAVE DONE TO HIM!!!

[She keeps trembling in silence]

If you do not speak I will unleash bullets into you bellies.

*[She tries to mumble but she is restrained by a lip sign from the mourners. He hits her belly with the revolver. She tumbles and screams. The people all rise but the fingers on the gun triggers make them shift backwards. **Titabet** remains unmoved]*

CAPTAIN ATANGANA

[Hits him with the gun]

SIT DOWN! NO! ROLL ON THE GROUND!

*[**Titabet** stiffens. **Ledou** shoots in the air.]*

TITABET

[Boldly] Do all you can on me but I will not move. You think with the body of Numvi lying before us I still fear death? We have borne your tortures for too long. I am ready to give up my life if justice can prevail in this land. I am ready to give up my life if only that can instil courage on my people. Unarmed citizens must not always be the sacrificial lamb when politicians battle for leadership. What is our crime? Are we the cause of dictatorship? Is opposition to government policy not an integral part of The Constitution? Should there not be a contrary voice in our country? I say I am ready to die for the children you systematically rape with broken bottles. Yes, kill me and then restore the life of those you had eliminated. Kill me! My blood will wash the innocent women and children you set on fire yesterday. Shoot me if only that can bring freedom to enslaved citizens. Look, it is said that the

shoulder has never grown taller than the head. Go ahead.
Our time will come too soon. That day the sun will shine.

[The sound of women and children sobbing can be heard from the mourners.]

CAPTAIN ATANGANA

[Determined] Now you either obey or be shot. Go down on your knees.

TITABET

I will not!

CORPORAL LEDOU

[Shoots him in the right leg. He falls. Mourners scream and wail.]

CAPTAIN ATANGANA

Are you ready to obey now!

*[Kicks his bottom and his head. Mourners rush towards him but both soldiers fire in the air. They again fall back. **Ledou** puts handcuffs on **Titabet**.]*

CORPORAL LEDOU

You will sleep in prison now for your whole life.

[Dragging him away.]

CAPTAIN ATANGANA

Now you stay and devour your corpse. **Allons-y corporal. On va montrer l'exemple `a celui-ci.**

[lights fade out on the mourners. A spotlight should identify the Narrator to the audience. He jumps up and entertains the audience as the curtain closes on the rest of the actors.]

NARRATOR

[Blows the trumpet of war as he moves casually back and forth talking to the audience. He should be relaxed. Sometimes he should take a baby from a member of the audience and carry it about as he delivers his speech. Drumbeats are played behind the stage. This includes two drums being hit repeatedly in equal rhythm with two long sticks. They punctuate the addresses of the narrator.]

Now our leaders have been taken away!

[speaking in Mungaka language]

A fu ndzo Mvi ni to to 'ti. Mfon yu' bo nñat, bu bo

Ndoñmi. Ba bo ma kupti mad ke bi a ka la mu a lo'ndi.

TRANSLATION

The world seems to be coming to an end. Our Leader, Titabet, is an elephant while we are his eyes. We must change the course of history today.

[drumbeats]

The nightfall soon lures the weeds to sleep. But we are determined to resist that temptation.

[Looking up to the sky]

Tah Nu, Koyila our ancestors, your boulders still glow with fire. No water can quench it.

[Drumbeats]

Look at yourselves ladies and gentlemen. See this baby I am holding. What is her crime? The government party has determined to put chains on her feet and our feet. **Titabet** has been arrested. What then are our obligations? Yes we have been asphyxiated for belonging to the opposition. Yes it is true the pigs testicles were accidentally thrown quite close to her anus because of opposition. This child needs not suffer this fate.

[Drumbeats]

Our main problem, ladies and Gentlemen, is that the government has ruled unsuccessfully since the resignation of the first Head of State. Roads are still as bad as they were ten years ago. Citizens still have to leave their various provinces to chase their files in the capital city.

Salaries of civil servants have undergone three successive reductions under the pretext of global economic crisis, prices of petroleum oil has continued to rise in spite of the fact that Cameroon is an oil producing nation. Bribery and corruption is still the order of the day in this country. All the para-public enterprises particularly in the anglophone provinces are headed by citizens of one single clan. Others have been privatised or simply been defunct like the National Produce Marketing Board (NPMB), Cameroon Bank, The Bali, Tiko and Bamenda Airports etc. This is why the anglophones in particular support the program of the opposition party that seeks decentralisation of power, scrapping bribery and corruption in government, equal opportunity for all regardless of tribe or origin and education for our children. Education and future for this child I am holding. This is what **Titabet** our leader stands for.

[Drumbeats and ululations]

Now I will have to join the fight for liberation. No more room for passivity. The time to take that decision to carve a future for this baby is now.

[exits]

PHASE 1 SCENE 2

[Titabet in Prison. A very dirty looking prison with cigarette butts, pieces of torn papers, etc. He is lying on a torn grass-made mattress snoring and shivering from cold. He gets up after a while and goes to urinate at the ninety degree corner of the prison wall. His emaciated body is visibly seen by the audience. A tiny window right up the wall is the only source of light into the prison. When the prison door opens his wife stands with a basket of food and the prison guard behind her. He is taken to the corridor to interact with his wife. The guard remains there to keep watch.]

TITABET

[He is wearing prison attire: Khaki shorts and a jacket. He starts eating slowly]

How is the family?

NAHSALA

[Drumbeats and ululations]

Now I will have to join the fight for liberation. No more room for passivity. The time to take that decision to carve a future for this baby is now.

[exits]

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TITABET

[He is wearing prison attire: Khaki shorts and a jacket. He starts eating slowly]

How is the family?

NAHSALA

[She is in her mid thirties, wearing a white blouse, a headtie that matches with her wrapper loincloth.]

They are fine my lord.

TITABET

How is **Lekunga** my darling daughter doing?

NAHSALA

She keeps on crying my lord. She can't sleep.

[Puts her left hand on her eyes to prevent tears from flowing]

TITABET

I am sure you didn't come here to weep.

NAHSALA

She has refused to eat or drink. Its only 'Where is Daddy? I want to see Daddy.' What have they done to you like this my lord?

TITABET

[Looks at her for a while. Then tears, too, start to drop. He tries to embrace her but is quickly stopped by the guard.]

GUARD

[Speaking in pidgin English]

Patron no gree dis one madam. Wouna body no get for touch another one.

TITABET

Did you bring water along?

NAHSALA

They took it from me.

TITABET

Why?

NAHSALA

I can't tell.

TITABET

[screaming]

That I should eat without drinking water!!!

GUARD

Massa. Me I want for telli you say for ya dem no di overtalk. Gun go come killi you you here o.

TITABET

What? That what? Have you ever heard that somebody ate food and was refused the permission to drink water?

GUARD

I say shot-up!!!No mekam I remember weti weh you don do. We no fit work plenti money for sika your operation dead..... Mami Pima!!

NAHSALA

Please my lord, do not answer him.

TITABET

Why not. I'm prepared to die. I'm not afraid of any man!!

GUARD

Me I go call my patron just now o?

[Goes out]

NAHSALA

My lord, look at your body. You want to be butchered before.....

TITABET

Let them do what they want. They want...

[coughs out a mucus and attempts to vomit]

NAHSALA

O God. Help me!

TITABET

I need water wife.

NAHSALA

I'll go now for it.

*[She goes out but on the way she is met by the guard and **Corporal Ledou**. They push her back into the prison]*

CORPORAL LEDOU

What happened old man?

TITABET

I need water to drink sah.

CORPORAL LEDOU

You'll not. You should be grateful at least for eating.
C'est tout! Normally you are supposed to be starved for at least three weeks.

TITABET

But I am choking sah!

CORPORAL LEDOU

Swallow your spit. That will teach you a lesson. You stay quiet. You have barely five more minutes with your wife
Guard you take care.*[Exit]*

GUARD

Yes sah! You don hear no?...

TITABET

You do not need to remind me.

NAHSALA

Please my lord do as you are told.

TITABET

I have no other choice wife. This is their time. We will have ours.

[to the guard]

I say brother. Nobi you bi my brother? Na for sika that 500frs c.f.a weh dem di give you weh.....

GUARD

Shut-up!!

TITABET

Dis peopo you no know dem. Dem commut for Yaounde.....

GUARD

I say cover your mob. You make am I go call.....

NAHSALA

Leave it my lord. Please it is enough.

TITABET

How are the others?

NAHSALA

Who my lord?

TITABET

Nahyuma and The Takumbeng?

GUARD

NO! You no get for talk da one. You nobi hear thing weh patron bin talk? Only family. No more no less.

TITABET

Is that all?

GUARD

Yes. And make me I remind you say you get two minutes for finish wetih your woman .

NAHSALA

My lord don't bother so much. They are all doing fine.

GUARD

Who dem?

NAHSALA

[Smiling]

I mean my children.

[Both of them stare at the guard with consternation. The guards walk about. When his face is away from them, Nahsala gives a letter to her husband.]

NAHSALA

Alright my dear husband. I'll go back now, since the time.....

GUARD

You still get small time left madam. So you fit go on.

[Nahsala takes away the dishes and spoons .She puts them into her basket.]

NAHSALA

Goodbye my lord. Till we ever meet again.

GUARD

[laughing]

You no di kiss your husband. No bi na...

NAHSALA

That is not your concern.

[EXITS and black out]

PHASE 2, SCENE 1

[The crowd is still on stage]

[Nugang'a, about 30 years of age, is another charismatic leader of the mourners. He is wearing torn farmer's attire. He is applauded each time he speaks. The narrator is by his right hand side. He supports him when he is about to stand. Nugang'a is handicapped. His two hands were chopped off during the confrontation between the people and the soldiers as he mistakenly picked-up an unexploded grenade that fell in the crowd.]

NUGANG'A

[Raising his Choped-off hands to the sky to address the ancestors.]

Our ancestors here we are. The leopard's head has fallen on its back. More harm has befallen us in the wake of dawn.

GUARD

[laughing]

You no di kiss your husband. No bi na...

NAHSALA

That is not your concern.

[EXITS and black out]

PHASE 2, SCENE 1

[The crowd is still on stage]

[Nugang'a, about 30 years of age, is another charismatic leader of the mourners. He is wearing torn farmer's attire. He is applauded each time he speaks. The narrator is by his right hand side. He supports him when he is about to stand. Nugang'a is handicapped. His two hands were chopped off during the confrontation between the people and the soldiers as he mistakenly picked-up an unexploded grenade that fell in the crowd.]

NUGANG'A

[Raising his Choped-off hands to the sky to address the ancestors.]

Our ancestors here we are. The leopard's head has fallen on its back. More harm has befallen us in the wake of dawn.

We remain powerless before the gun and the gun has rendered men powerless. We are now impotent before our women and children. Oh! where are you our ancestors? We need help. Our bare hands cannot protect us. Only your whimsical prowess can restore hope to us. We face traumas of varying degrees. How can my firewood be spared in the forest with all sorts of twigs to pull it down from my shoulders? Only for it to be obstructed by the elephant grass on the hills on my way home? You tell me. Please we need your help. This land is no longer the land you left for us. Women and children are kidnapped before our open eyes. Young men have all escaped to the bushes. Please come to our aid. The land is on fire. We all will be exterminated and there will be no seed for progeny. Come to our rescue. We are no longer free to hold peaceful demonstrations.

[Long silence]

What do we do with Numvi now that the thunder has clattered?

MOURNERS

Lets bury him.....lets take him to his killer.....you want to be killed.....we are too afraid.....lets bury him.....lets take him to his killer I say.....NO!.....YES.....Let's rather seek the release of **Titabet**....You mean Numvi is not important.....I did not say so.....You said so.....No Yes.....No..... *[They start quarrelling among themselves]*

NUGANG'A

Let's take him to the Governor.

A Mourner

Weh, the guns...!!!!

NUGANG`A

What do we do then?

MOURNERS

Let's go with him...

NUGANG`A

To?!!

MOURNERS

We don't know.

NUGANG`A

I have a suggestion to make.

MOURNERS

Yes....

NUGANG`A

We take him to where our leader has been imprisoned!

MOURNERS

And then!

NUGANG`A

[Silence]

[Drumbeats and ululations]

TAKUMBENG WILL SPEAK!!!

MOURNERS

Yes the Takumbeng. We want The Takumbeng. Enough is enough!

[They carry the body away and as they move out they sing the nyankwe song of Takumbeng.]

[SONG]

*Nyankwe nyankwe we ya o
o ,o we ya o nyankwe nyankwe
we yi wo
Bo nun Tita ma da chang o*

CHORUS

*Nyankwe nyankwe we ya o
Nyankwe nyankwe.*

REFRAIN

1
*o yi o chindab nke nu
Ntsi ndab Kunú, nú ma mbendab*

2 *Mfon yu' bo nñat, bu bo Ndoñmi.*

TRANSLATION

Nyankwe (*juju for cleansing*)
Help us because Titabet has been imprisoned.
Remember our leader is the elephant while we are its eyes.

PHASE 2, SCENE 2

[A group of mainly elderly women about 60 years old appear on stage. They are naked but for leaves or 'ngwashi' that cover their private parts. They belong to the women sacred cult known as Takumbeng'. They should be minimum fifteen of them. But only their chosen leaders speak to the group. Time: midnight! Their bodies are rubbed with red camwood. They parade the city of Bamenda during major incidents that the unarmed cannot handle. They expose their naked vaginas to the victims while cursing them using special occultism like spiting on stones and shooting the victims with or spreading wood ash. This wood ash is a sign of casting out the purported victims out of the land. They sing the Nyankwe song at regular intervals.]

NAHYUMA (LEADER)

Mother owl has hatched her young ones. The night will continue to be frightful. Termites' mounds are now pregnant with snakes. There must be a way out!

NAHYENI (ASSISTANT)

Cow-dung is now used as delicious dishes for our husbands.

Dogs excrement is found everywhere on the streets. There should be a way out!

NAHVOMA

My throat has become sore because of dry saliva. My household has become dead because rain drops have pierced my rooftops. Raindrops have replaced my husband! But there must be a way out

NAHTEMA

Locusts have harvested my crops at 'Nkeform'. Monkeys and wild geese have grazed on my produce. The soil revolts. We are starving. But there has to be a way out!

ALL

Yes there has to be a way out!!!

NAHYUMA

Our tongues must not swallow hot pebbles. We should not keep feeding on anger. Our spit no longer feeds our empty stomach! Two months of ceaseless curfew is more than any living being can bear.

NAHYENI

Is this not our fatherland! Is this not our HOME! Please tell me, where do we go from here? Our children now suck milkless breasts. Must a generation bear the brunt of political tussling?

NAHVOMA

NO! Whoever soiled his hands in the death of Numvi, the burning of innocent group of young men, the raping of our kids and now our leader, **Titabet**, must have ripe bananas placed on his head and buried alive. Yes this act must be done.

NAHTEMA

Our husbands and male children are on the run. The city now belongs to two people: The old and the soldiers. Our men are starving in the bush. Who will provide protection for us against Evil?

ALL

Our ancestors, come to our aid!

[They formed a semi-circle. Act out their occult rituals and sing mournfully. Their song is interrupted by a voice offstage]

VOICE

Our bullets will chop you down. Our tear gas and grenades will blind your eyes and make you crippled for life. Leave I say! Your traditional oaths are powerless. Science has taken over. You primitive women, away. Do not become slaves to impotent occultism. Go away and be ashamed of your ignorance. Just disclose the hiding places of your Men and we will free your leader. If not we will kill him like Numvi and force his body through your mouths. Enough is Enough in this Bamenda. I say Enough is Enough do you

hear? You babbling anglophones. Anglophones are terrorists. These terrorists want to unseat the government! Do you old women want to be governed by terrorists? They are criminals who deserved to be punished by gun fire. I repeat Go away! Leave now!

[sounds of gun-shots]

TAKUMBENG

[In unison] Our hands are clean. Our eyes are open. We haven't stolen from a stranger. We haven't borrowed firewood from a helpless widow. We are only asking for justice and freedom for our lives. Our daughters can no longer go to school for fear of being raped and then sterilised. Foreigners have taken over our homestead. They have taken control over us. We are now slaves in broad daylight. Our young men are hiding in the bushes while the city contains two groups of people: The military and the old. Yes the old. What is our crime? Our predecessors, if you have our ears then this is what we humbly ask: Let thunder clatter and shatter the barracks. Let the soldiers be dumb and powerless.

[They stamp their feet and disappear]

NARRATOR

[Emerging from the back of the stage]

And so it is. Yes. So it is. Will my determination equal my might? The python will only crawl on its belly. It will never develop legs. My cracked shell can never be exchanged for a new one. If it is off, it is off. The people have sworn to assemble tomorrow under the leadership of their chief. Yes the chief has decided to speak tomorrow. Will they succeed

in sending the soldiers away? Is it going to be another bloody confrontation? Let's watch and see.

[Exit]

[Sounds of heavy rainfall and thunder. The use of light effects create lightening on a dark stage. After a while Captain Atangana & Ledou creep unto the stage. They are unarmed and thoroughly soaked.]

CAPTAIN ATANGANA

What a terrible night!

CORPORAL LEDOU

What frightful weather.

CAPTAIN ATANGANA

What a strange phenomenon!

CORPORAL LEDOU

What a bad Omen!

CAPTAIN ATANGANA

I fear for my life!

CORPORAL LEDOU

I fear for my property!

CAPTAIN ATANGANA

I fear for the overall outcome!

CORPORAL LEDOU

I fear for the river dividing this village and the city!

CAPTAIN ATANGANA

What do you think we should do?

CORPORAL LEDOU

Where do we go from here?

CAPTAIN ATANGANA

Where are the people!

CORPORAL LEDOU

Which people?

CAPTAIN ATANGANA

You mean you don't know what I am talking about?

CORPORAL LEDOU

You too don't understand me!

[They become silent. More rainfall and thunder. They cease suddenly! The Takumbeng rhythm is heard from a distance. It gets closer and closer.]

CAPTAIN ATANGANA

[Screaming] Let's move away from here!

[As they try to run away the rhythm envelops both exits. Rises to a crescendo then subsides. Captain is screaming and weeping]

Brother what is really happening. Can you tell me?

CORPORAL LEDOU

[Pretending courage] I don't know. We are in chains.

CAPTAIN ATANGANA

With?

CORPORAL LEDOU

The Takumbeng cult

CAPTAIN ATANGANA

The WHAT!!!

[more Takumbeng rhythm from both sides of the stage]

We apologise for our acts!!

CORPORAL LEDOU

We promise to return your Leader!

CAPTAIN ATANGANA

We will repay the damage.

CORPORAL LEDOU

Have you seen our guns?

CAPTAIN ATANGANA

Yes that is very important. You give our guns, we give you **Titabet**. Is that not so brother?

[Turning to Ledou]

CORPORAL LEDOU

Yes you are right brother.

CAPTAIN ATANGANA

[Supplicating] Will you do that?

[Silence]

Maybe we are only talking to ourselves.

[Starts weeping]

CORPORAL LEDOU

You think so?

CAPTAIN ATANGANA

Stop asking me useless questions. We are on the threshold of death and instead of looking for a way out, you are throwing my questions back to me.

CORPORAL LEDOU

Sorry brother

CAPTAIN ATANGANA

Sorry for what? Do you know you are the cause of this mishap?

CORPORAL LEDOU

Both of us or me alone? Mon Capitain!

CAPTAIN ATANGANA

I warned you to use rubber bullets. Now you have killed Numvi. That is why we are in problems.

CORPORAL LEDOU

Is it me who shot Numvi or the military? When the people decided to set houses on fire, were we not ordered by Yaoundé to shoot? Let us distinguish two things.

CAPTAIN ATANGANA

You shot this guy and fired at **Titabet's** leg. Remember that was not the instruction from above.

CORPORAL LEDOU

I swear in God's name that both of us killed Numvi and shot the leg of **Titabet**. Don't single out yourself now because danger is coming. At the war front it is the army who bears responsibility for casualties not a soldier. So, don't pretend.

CAPTAIN ATANGANA

[Threatening] Don't use such harsh words on me again. This is the last time. You hear! **Espece de con! Merde! Parce-que je vous ai donne'la parole? Vous n'avez pas le droit de m'adresser comme si....D' ailleur on va encore voir.** I will tell these people to revenge their brother's death on you. You the KILLER!

CORPORAL LEDOU

Mon Dieu, Moi? I will also disclose to them the rape and torture you perpetrated.

CAPTAIN ATANGANA

[Threatening and coming closer] Shut up your dirty fangs. You killer. I only made love, I did not kill like you. Dirty pig! **Mais qu'est-ce qui c'est passe avec toi?**

CORPORAL LEDOU

You raped a pregnant woman. And after that you pushed a bottle through her womb.

CAPTAIN ATANGANA

Enough.

[Gives him a hard blow on the cheek. He tumbles. Gains energy and springs back. With summersault techniques he throws him on the ground. They roll on each other dashing blows at any given opportunity.]

[Takumbeng rhythms again echoes. They rise and find the leader of Takumbeng holding an axe and a cock. They both fall to each other watching Takumbeng in awe. A victory song of the women is heard in the background.]

TAKUMBENG 1

I stand before you as the messenger of the unarmed. I stand here as the messenger of the powerless. I stand before you to give the message of the dumb and the deaf. Yes I am the bringer of the people's message. The thickness of the cloud must give way to sunshine. Let the birds sing. Let them sing songs of freedom. We have for so long been tied with strings. We have been chained and brutalised for years on end just because we continue to remain at the bottom. There comes a time when enslaved people can no longer

bare the tyranny of the government. What crime have we committed? For voting politicians to power? What wrong? Why must children and women always carry the dregs of power tussle? Our men on the other hand have all fled their homes. Guns have taken over the destiny of our people. No! It has to end! It has to end today! Where is **Titabet** our leader?

[Soldiers look at each other and shrug their shoulders]

Where is **Numvi**?

[Footsteps of the entire Takumbeng group are heard. As they proceed to encircle the soldiers, sounds of gunshot are heard. They disappear backstage leaving the soldiers in the middle. They now seem to regain courage.]

CAPTAIN ATANGANA

They have rescued us. Let's move. Reinforcements from the

Capital. *[Shouting]* Yes we are here. **Nous sommes ici. Venez mes Frères.**

CORPORAL LEDOU

Oui venez par ici. Merci beaucoup!!! Venez vite!!!

PHASE 3, SCENE 1

[The Narrator appears on stage with very shattered looks. From his appearance one can easily detect that he is not only worried but confused. He keeps looking left and right in a spirit of fright though maintaining his stamina.]

NARRATOR

My blood sings the hollow note of despair. The sun may set in the west and rise in the east. I fear for my life. I fear for Takumbeng.

[Sounds of distant gunshots]

Takumbeng our last hope is in disarray. Women, children and men now sleep in the bushes. They have run away from their homes. They dread the tear gas, they shiver at the sound of the grenade bomb. Helicopters now cycle our skies.

[Sound of helicopter and grenades approaching. He runs from one end of the stage to the other, shivering.]

Masks and disguises are now common. No true enemy no true friend. Some of our brothers have joined them for money. Yes money quest will make them betray all the hiding places. Help me please. Help

[More gunshots]

The soldiers have been reinforced. But hopes are not dead yet.

[Exit]

[As the narrator leaves the stage the entire stage is transformed. Before the home of Titabet, Nahsala is

playing with Lekunga her little daughter of six. She is also feeding her with pap. The setting of the house should show Titabet as a man of influence. Nahsala is singing a lullaby to her daughter after feeding her to sleep. In her partial sleep she keeps asking for Daddy. There's a knock on the door. CAPTAIN ATANGANA comes in disguised.]

CAPTAIN ATANGANA

Good morning Madam?

NAHSALA

Good morning. Who are you please?

ATANGANA

I am a messenger.

NAHSALA

From?

ATANGANA

Please could you first give me water to drink?

NAHSALA

[Goes in for the drink as Atangana remains and plays with Lekunga. Nahsala comes back with water in a glass.]

ATANGANA

You see, you are fine madam.

NAHSALA

What do you mean by fine.

ATANGANA

This kind of house can only be owned by rich people.

NAHSALA

Are you flattering me or....

ATANGANA

No I am not. I

NAHSALA

But where are you from and what is your mission here?
You know my husband.....

ATANGANA

Ssh...Madam. I said I am a messenger.

NAHSALA

But from where?

ATANGANA

Douala

NAHSALA

I see. How was the operation dead city there? I mean the
civil disobedience campaign?

ATANGANA

Perfect. You know we are doing everything to get back our stolen victory.

NAHSALA

Ofcourse. It will come back. The government cannot continue to cheat the people for ever.

ATANGANA

So where did you say your husband was?

NAHSALA

In jail.

ATANGANA

Sure? I thought they just confined him to one place.

NAHSALA

What is one place? I went to the prison and was disallowed the privilege and right to give him water to drink.

ATANGANA

You are kidding madam

NAHSALA

I am not. Yesterday I read in the papers that my husband drinks the urine of Captain Atangana for water.

ATANGANA

That is not true madam. In which paper?

NAHSALA

I can bring it to you.

[Gets up to go. But is interrupted by him.]

ATANGANA

Later. This is sad madam. But maybe it is his way of doing things.

NAHSALA

What do you mean way of doing things? Is Douala doing a different thing from Bamenda? I even hear you are successful.

ATANGANA

But we can never beat Bamenda. Well I came to see how we can seek his release.

NAHSALA

That is good news.

[At this time Lekunga asks for more food from her mother]

Lekunga you know we are managing. Your father needs to come back before....

ATANGANA

[Searching his pockets]

That is no problem. Take this for her meal this evening.

[Gives her a ten thousand FCFA note]

NAHSALA

[Smiling] This is so much. You people are better off than us.

ATANGANA

It's just the way we deal with situations.

NAHSALA

How?

ATANGANA

Could you take her into the room so we can talk?

NAHSALA

No problem. *[Goes in with Lekunga and then returns.]*

ATANGANA

[Taking her by the side] I want to help you.

NAHSALA

I am listening.

ATANGANA

I have some money here with me.

NAHSALA

So?

ATANGANA

It will help to relieve you and your baby from hunger.

NAHSALA

That is interesting. Was it donated by the Douala militants?

ATANGANA

Em...yes.. and no.

NAHSALA

I don't understand

ATANGANA

It is my personal effort to help you. You are the wife of a powerful leader in this country you know. You don't have to suffer much.

NAHSALA

[smiling] Yes....

ATANGANA

But I have pity for you. I feel for you. When I heard the news from Douala I almost wept for you. A beautiful woman like you should not...

NAHSALA

Please can you get to the point?

ATANGANA

Do you belong to the Taku...kum... How do you call it here?

NAHSALA

You mean the Takumbeng?

ATANGANA

Right!

NAHSALA

Why do you ask?

ATANGANA

Please do me a favour. Don't ask too much. Just answer me.

NAHSALA

All elderly women are members

ATANGANA

Good. I have with me five hundred thousand frs cfa to give you to help me disband that movement.

*[Nahsala tries to escape but he holds her firmly.
When she tries to scream he covers her mouth while
pulling her upfront before the centre of the stage.]*

ATANGANA

Listen woman. My name is Captain Atangana the one who imprisoned your husband. If you try to scream I'll finish off your skull.

[Brandishing a pistol]

See. Do you see? Take me inside the house and show me

all the secret files of your husband. Remember no jokes about this.

[Releases her from his grip and only points the gun at her. She tries to sob.]

Heh! No sound. Just move inside.

[By this time he has taken off his dark eye glasses and other disguise garment. Nahsala moves ahead of him as they enter the house.]

PHASE 3, SCENE 2

[The Takumbeng is meeting in her original sacred shrine far removed from the city. The use of light should suggest this. They are crammed inside a hut with firewood smouldering with fire at the centre. From their small number it is evident that some are either missing or have decided not to participate for fear of the soldiers. They are all standing with ferocious looks. They speak in low tones because of the tense atmosphere now prevailing in Bamenda.]

NAHYUMA(LEADER)

Takumbeng our sacred cult is almost in disarray!

NAHYENI(ASSISTANT)

Let us not give up yet!

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NAHVOMA

A terrible ordeal has happened to Nahsala

NAHTEMA

She has been incarcerated like her husband. Just because she refused to yield to Captain's demands.

NAHYUMA

We have to carry the message to the governor tonight.

NAHYENI

And to the barracks!!

NAHVOMA

Midnight is the time, sisters. We must march as usual. Forget about those who have not joined us for fear of the gun.

NAHTEMA

It is said that when the house is on fire, the cats escape through the side holes.

NAHYUMA

You are right. Like cats we must change tactics. Tiptoe! Yes tiptoe, sisters until we are at the barracks. Nahyeni, forget not to blow out the ash to towards the sky.

NAHYENI

Ofcourse not. I already have it with me. Thus we will finally cast the enemy away.

NAHYUMA

Last but one sister. Your hands must be clasped in respect to our ancestors when we are moving. We will only open them when we must have surrounded the barracks.

[She then moves to the threshold of the hut to perform the departure rites.]

Our dead but living spirits, Give us more force to cleanse this land from danger. Takumbeng as you know is the weapon of the unarmed. Let us salvage this land from pain and death. Tonight let your will be done.

[They all come forward swearing by rubbing their faces on the insignia before leaving the stage.]

[END]

“The quest for democracy is a universal struggle whose pursuit is shaped by local realities and rivalries. The playwright captures the painful first breathes of that elusive democratic ideal through a confrontation between the status quo and forces for change. Trapped behind the conflicting and complementary walls of modernity and tradition the characters expose the real and perceived complexities of democratization in Cameroon.”

Fonteh Akum, Washington D.C., USA

Titabet and the Takumbeng is a play that relives the unprecedented political upheaval of the 1992 first ever multiparty presidential elections in Cameroon. Following the controversial elections, Bamenda – the stronghold of the main opposition party, the Social Democratic Front (SDF) – was plunged into a tense and intense civil disobedience campaign. The violence which ensued pitted SDF militants who claimed their victory was stolen against regime loyalists. The government reacted by imposing a curfew on Bamenda. The army that was dispatched to keep the peace committed ferocious kidnapping, rape, theft and torture, driving women, children and men into the arms of terror. Titabet the protagonist emerges as the leader of the oppressed. He and the sacred women’s cult of Takumbeng were the only hope for the people. The sacred cleansing cult and Titabet’s courageous resistance apparently brought an end to what would have been too devastating a tale to narrate.

“Kehbuma Langmia is to be applauded for finding an authentic yet utterly contemporary means to tell a dramatic story, full of tension, of utmost importance to his own people and fascinating, educational and engaging for audiences anywhere.”

Jane Plastow, Professor of African Theatre, University of Leeds, UK

Kehbuma Langmia teaches courses in Mass Communications, Broadcast Journalism and Media Studies at Bowie State University. With previous degrees in fine arts, television and film, he earned his PhD in Mass Communication and Media Studies from Howard University. He also has an MA degree in theatre arts from the University of Yaoundé, Cameroon. He is also a graduate from the Television Academy in Munich, Germany. Dr. Langmia writes, produces and directs independent productions, and serves as executive producer for students’ television projects at Bowie State University.



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